



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
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Commissioner

TESTIMONY OF DR. LINDA S. SCHWARTZ, COMMISSIONER,
Department of Veterans' Affairs
Submitted to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs
February 19, 2009

HB 6406: AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am pleased to offer this written testimony on H 6406, *An Act Concerning the Military Support Program*, which adds the Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to CGS Section 17a-453d as a collaborating agency with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) in the oversight and support of the Military Support Program. This language is a technical change reflecting the existing collaboration, support, and responsibilities already performed by the Department of Veterans' Affairs for the Military Support Program. This language change is supported by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The Military Support Program, administered by DMHAS, provides free, confidential and accessible behavioral health counseling services to all Connecticut members of the National Guard and Reserves and their families who may be impacted by the stress of active duty deployments.

DVA staff, along with colleagues from DMHAS and the Military Department, contributed to the original design and development of the program, including assisting with and hosting the initial training for volunteer clinicians. The DVA's Office of Advocacy and Assistance has been an active participant in the growth of the Military Support Program through aggressive dissemination of information through benefit offices throughout the state and by staff referrals through the Department's Veterans' Information Line. In addition, the agency has helped develop and air public

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service announcements promoting the program and the agency's website offers a one-stop portal entrance to Military Support Program information for any eligible OEF/OIF veteran or their family in the state. The Military Support Program is also a featured program at all information briefings provided by DVA staff to returning OEF/OIF National Guard and Reserve units, at veterans benefits and job fairs we co-sponsor, and on public college campuses through the Veterans' OASIS centers which we are establishing.

The Military Support Program is a nationwide model for how states can step up to the plate and provide professional, flexible behavioral health services to OEF/OIF veterans and their families to help close the gaps in services provided by the Federal VA. This is a well-designed and effective program that is providing a much-needed lifeline to dozens of service members and families across the state. We are proud to be a collaborating agency on this program and look forward to continuing our active support role.

I urge your support of this bill to add the Department of Veterans' Affairs to the statute establishing the Military Support Program. Thank you.